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ABSTRACT

The creation of a classroom that is more receptive to individual and cultural differences and the inclusion of the intangible elements of culture in the total instructional plan will increase the effectiveness of the educational process in bilingual-bicultural programs. In planning a cultural component for the bilingual-bicultural classroom, the tangible and intangible elements of culture should be included. The tangible elements, such as language, songs, dances, and legends, are closely related to subject matter and thus can be taught systematically. The intangible elements, such as values, ideals, and attitudes, cannot be taught methodically or directly, but are learned through personal interaction with members of the culture group. Since the intangible elements involve process more than subject matter, they should be incorporated into the instructional processes used in the classroom. These general methods and approaches are recommended as the basis for all the content areas: (1) the creation of a classroom environment receptive to individual differences; (2) the use of the classroom as a multicultural resource center open to all interested persons; (3) a diversity in teaching and learning styles; (4) a flexible curriculum with attainable goals, responsive to student interests; (5) the teacher's role as a counselor rather than a dictator; (6) teachers and curricula that promote the motivation to learn; (7) the use of field experiences; (8) heterogeneous grouping; (9) peer teaching and learning; and (10) cross-age teaching and learning. (Author/LG)

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CULTURE IN THE BILINGUAL-BICULTURAL CURRICULUM

The cultural component of a bilingual-bicultural curriculum is one of the most misunderstood aspects of bilingual education. The task of teaching culture in the classroom has caused considerable concern among teachers, curriculum writers and researchers; and yet, few logical solutions have been adopted to insure successful achievement in one of the basic goals of bilingual-bicultural education. This basic goal is one of providing students of varied cultural and linguistic backgrounds an opportunity to come together as individuals and learn whatever it is they need to learn in order to successfully function in a multi-cultural world.

Bilingual-bicultural education has provided a successful alternative to students of diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds, but we as educators have not yet tapped all the potential that such a program can offer all students. Heavy emphasis has been placed on language learning in a bilingual setting, and the gains have been remarkable. We cannot challenge the value of bilingual education as it exists today, but we have neglected the refinement of bicultural or multi-cultural education.

It is a fact that language cannot be separated from culture; but neither can culture be separated from education, for it is through his cultural background that a student perceives himself, his peers, his school, his teachers and what education has to offer him.

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Learning as a Remodeling Process

A bilingual-bicultural classroom represents American society as it exists today - a diversified mixture of experiences, cultures, languages, viewpoints and motivations to succeed. As educators we must realize that students today are oriented to the present - the here-and-now world; and for each student this here-and-now world is conceptualized through his cultural background and experiences, which in turn create his motives for success. Every student, whatever his background, brings to school a wealth of experiences. To each student his own experiences have meaning and have in large measure shaped him. Therefore, room must be made in the instructional plan for every student's viewpoint in order to provide a relevant and meaningful educational experience. We can no longer afford to prescribe one instructional plan that suits every individual in a classroom, for learning is a "remodeling process" based in part on the learner's past experiences and partly on the here-and-now situations experienced in the school and in his community. Just like language and culture, true learning is an ever-changing reorganization of the past and the present.

"Culturally Democratic" Instruction

Methods of instruction should be compatible with the ways students are accustomed to learning. Educators must be aware that cognitive styles are culturally influenced rather than universal among men, and teachers should build ways in which culturally different individuals approach problem-solving. It is important to accept,

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understand and appreciate the fact that individuals of other cultures function as viable and valuable models of alternative life styles and viewpoints. If this concept is put into effect in the classroom, then "culturally democratic" education becomes a reality. Furthermore, if educators are to adopt "culturally democratic" education in a bilingual-bicultural classroom, then culture must become an important aspect of the instructional plan. It cannot be an isolated component of the curriculum, but rather an integrated part of the total thrust in bilingual-bicultural education.

The Inclusion of Culture in the Curriculum

The inclusion of cultural elements in the instructional plan of a bilingual-bicultural program requires an investigation into the interpretation of the controversial term "culture" and its implications as a teachable item. A valid hypothesis is that culture cannot be totally taught in a classroom. While some elements of culture can be readily transmitted from teacher to students, others can only be acquired by experiencing close personal interaction with members of the cultural group.

The need exists for establishing a system of classifying cultural elements into two categories: tangible and intangible. The tangible elements are those that are concrete and can be systematically taught in the classroom. Included in this category are such items as language, songs, dances, foods, holidays, etc. The intangible category includes such elements as values, beliefs and attitudes held by members of a particular cultural group. These important intangible elements are often neglected or ignored in the

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instructional plan because they cannot be methodically taught. However, it is the exchange and sharing of these intangible items that provide the key for a sound bicultural or multi-cultural program in the school. Since these intangible items cannot be taught, their manifestation comes through classroom experiences that allow close personal interaction among persons of diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds.

This is not to say that values and beliefs of other cultural groups are acquired merely by personal contact with them, but through close interpersonal relationships one acquires better understanding and acceptance of diverse and often opposing viewpoints. The bilingual-bicultural classroom, because of its physical setting and composition, provides the unique opportunity for this close interaction to occur among students of diverse cultural backgrounds.

Many educators involved in bilingual-bicultural education will say, "But this is already happening in my program!" It cannot be denied that their students are interacting daily, but most of this cultural interchange materializes without much planned effort on the part of the teacher. Consequently, many students never fully gain all the benefits that bicultural education has to offer.

What is proposed here is that educators involved in bilingual-bicultural education foster the inclusion of more intangible elements of culture into the instructional process. Granted, the tangible elements such as language, folklore, dances, songs, etc., are extremely important, but let us not limit bicultural or multi-cultural education to just that.

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Basic Recommendations for Increasing Multi-Cultural Learning

In order to increase bicultural or multi-cultural learning in the classroom, it is recommended that educators emphasize educational process, in addition to curriculum content. Whereas the tangible elements of culture are closer related to subject matter, the intangible elements should be incorporated into the instructional process(es) used in the classroom. Both process and content are necessary in the overall instructional plan, but it is the process that is the fundamental factor in promoting multi-cultural learning.

The following ten points focus on educational processes that will assist educators in establishing a bicultural or multi-cultural instructional plan. If these processes are used in a cross-curricular effort, then the intangible elements of culture will be embodied in all content areas of the curriculum.

1. The Classroom as a Safe Place

   This calls for the creation of a classroom environment that allows every student to be an individual, both socially and academically. The success of a teacher and his classroom rests upon the success of his students. Thus, success requires every student to progress through his own means, without risking appraisal based on cultural and academic stereotypes. In order to create this non-threatening atmosphere, the teacher, acting as a cross-cultural interpreter, must cease to impose value judgments based solely on his life style and the institutions it represents.

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2. The Classroom as a Multi-Cultural Center

The classroom should become a workshop, a collection center and a resource center for students and teachers alike. In addition, teacher aides, community aides, parents, resource persons and anyone interested in the full-time occupants of that classroom should be allowed to come in at any time and share their experiences in a natural, non-threatening, cross-cultural environment.

3. Diversity in Teaching and Learning Styles

Because cultural background predisposes cognitive styles and because individual differences influence learning, the teacher must undertake a variety of teaching styles in order to make the classroom experience worthwhile for every student. This diversity in teaching styles will promote an exchange and sharing of learning styles among the students, while each one is learning through the mode which he finds most successful.

4. Humanizing Instruction and Learning

It is important for teachers to develop instructional objectives that are reasonable to attain by each member of the class. The curriculum for a bilingual-bicultural classroom must be a flexible one. It should be one that is based on the needs and the here-and-now attitudes of the students, for no instructional plan is successful unless each student accepts it and sees it as relevant to his needs and goals. This concept necessitates student input into the curriculum plans of the class.

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5. The Teacher as a Counselor

In a "culturally democratic" classroom the teacher is not dictating a curriculum that all students must adhere to; but rather, the teacher assumes a less dominant role in which he becomes the pivotal force for motivating students to succeed. The teacher then becomes a counselor, not a dictator, in an experience that allows the students to be themselves. And yet, the teacher is providing guidance for a meaningful experience that will enable the student to reorganize his past and his present endeavors.

6. Motivating Students

The teacher cannot actually motivate students. The teacher can only arrange conditions that will increase the probability of motivating students to achieve the goals of the class. A teacher cannot neglect the needs and attitudes of the students in his class. For this reason, the curriculum of each classroom has to be unique, and it should reflect the individual interests and abilities of the students. In addition, the classroom experience should be a cooperative effort that recognizes and accepts the contributions of each individual. This will promote motivation to learn, for motivation must come from within. No one can motivate another person unless there is mutual acceptance and trust.

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7. Field Experiences as a Way of Knowing

The classroom must become a complement to the life of every individual involved in it. Irrelevancy in education to the real world has alienated many students from success. Too often students do not understand school and teacher expectations. This lack of understanding can terminate by providing on-campus and off-campus experiences that enable the student to see the school and the classroom as a genuine part of his total existence.

8. Heterogeneous Groupings in the Classroom

The learning situations in the classroom must reflect the here-and-now world that students are confronted with daily. By allowing students to work and communicate in small heterogeneous groups, the classroom is providing a conducive environment that enables students to come together and exchange both academic and social(cultural) viewpoints in a productive and culturally democratic environment.

9. Peer Teaching and Learning

No one can deny that the teaching role in itself provides great challenge, as well as significant self-realization. In a natural way, the experiences one has to share with others are in reality a teaching and learning encounter. In a bilingual-bicultural classroom the experiences that can be shared by individuals are substantial. Both culturally and academically, the students bring a great

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wealth of knowledge to the class. Sharing this knowledge and cultural background is the epitome of bilingual-bicultural education. By having students in the class teach and learn from each other, educators are opening up a channel that is a natural learning mode for all human beings.

10. Cross-age Teaching and Learning

The more experienced have always taught the less experienced. All teachers have learned from teaching others; we cannot deny the fact. The classroom also can become a setting in which all individuals, regardless of age, can interact in meaningful learning experiences. It is no crime to share knowledge. We as adults do it everyday, without paying attention to age differences. Let us also make the classroom a refuge for sharing experiences and learning from many people - the teachers, teacher aides, parents, older students, younger students, community people, and anyone else interested in sharing his knowledge. We as educators must keep in mind that individuals with teaching credentials are not the only ones that can teach effectively.

No one can be deceived into believing that by following these ten points one can insure success in bicultural education; but rather, let us look at these recommendations as a means of personalizing an instructional plan that will incite greater success among today's students.

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The Expansion of Bilingual-Bicultural Education

The creation of a more humanized classroom and the inclusion of the intangible elements of culture into the total instructional plan will expand the viability of bilingual-bicultural education to a new level. Whereas bilingual-bicultural education is still considered by many to be a remedial approach to learning, it should be viewed as an innovative trend in American education. By recognizing the bilingual-bicultural approach as a sound alternative to traditional education, we can provide all students - minority as well as majority - with a worthwhile school experience that is stimulating, productive and relevant.

Bilingual-bicultural education has been successful, but it can be made more successful by making it a true representation of today's here-and-now world. We no longer have to make excuses for the Chicano, the Black, the Indian, the Oriental, and even the Anglo not succeeding in school. What must be done is provide an educational setting that will allow all of these students to be individuals and succeed in a school and a society that accepts what they are and who they are; from there, the educator builds an instructional plan that fulfills the needs and provides the alternatives for success in today's multi-cultural world.

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